

# Living with Wolves: Environmental groups weigh in

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BOZEMAN - The 1995 reintroduction of the gray wolf into Yellowstone National Park completed the full cast of animals present when Lewis and Clark traveled through the area over 200 years ago.

In addition to being a prominent member of the landscape, the wolves have also become a "must see" for many tourists, such as Washington, D.C. resident Ginny Michaux.

Michaux and her husband, along with 20 other tourists from around the country, are convening in Yellowstone for a winter excursion, and they're excited at the prospect of seeing wolves.

In fact, wolf-watching is now the second most popular activity in the park. "The first is grizzlies, hoping to see a grizzly, the second is wolves and the third is looking at geysers," said Mike Clark of the Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

Now that wolves have now re-established themselves as a keystone species in that ecosystem, some environmental groups do not think the iconic and controversial predator is being sustainably managed.

A 2006 study from the University of Montana found tourists visiting Yellowstone specifically to see wolves bring in \$35 million to the local economy every year. Compare that with the study's estimated loss to ranchers from livestock depredation - less than \$64,000.

But to make sure wolves stay on a path to real recovery, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition wants to see some changes. The first is get them back on the endangered species list

Right now, the gray wolf remains endangered in Wyoming, but delisted in Montana and Idaho. "Which sets a very troubling precedent about splitting a population and considering some of it recovered and some of it not recovered," Doug Honald, an Earth Justice lawyer representing the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, said.

The group doesn't think it is time for a hunt, saying the states want to kill more wolves than the population can safely sustain.

As long as wolves remain in the West, they will likely keep running into conflict with ranchers. Honald

says humans need to learn how to coexist with the wolves, adding, "But if it's just kind of a 'shoot, shovel and shut up' approach to wolves, we're never going to learn how to do that."

Honald believes science and the law remain firmly on his side.